

Video Art, not trying to be popular, but thoughtful

Video art does not sell nearly as well as "Rambo" on video store shelves, but that's because video art is not made to be sold as entertainment, according to Ralph Hocking, a professor in the cinema department who teaches video as studio art. Video is a burgeoning medium in the art world with wide-ranging parameters, and therefore, no set guidelines or definitions in its use. Hocking limits himself to defining video art as the "noncommercial use of a video tape for artistic expression."

Please don't confuse video art with rock music videos. "Music videos are made to sell bands. They're a part of the commercial market—making money, not art," Hocking asserts. "Art is not trying to be popular, it's trying to be thoughtful," he explains. Video art, along with other art forms, means "reaching out to the cutting edge of ideas,"

he adds.

Video first entered the artist's realm with the introduction of portable video equipment to the United States in 1966. Video art formats have evolved since then from rudimentary, politically motivated productions, to high-tech, abstract computer imagery. Hocking sees similarities in the artist's use of video to the art of painting: "You can manipulate electronic signals to 'paint' an image on screen." Video brings an added dimension by making use of the element of time, along with height and width perceptions, he says.

Lawrence Gottheim, professor of cinema who teaches "Experiments and Innovations in Film and Video," led an audience discussion at a recent video art screening on campus of work by 15 internationally-recognized video artists. The advent of non-

commercial video allows people who work with the medium, "new freedom with no time constraints," he commented.

As a medium for artistic expression, video offers unusual qualities that make it a "very different system than film," Gottheim observed. "Video has an immediacy and an aliveness film doesn't." The artist can see the image as it's recorded on the camera monitor, and it can be immediately played back, he explained, whereas film must be developed first. Video can also tolerate a high degree of manipulation, Gottheim said, interfacing with synthesizers and computers to transform the taped images and sounds.

At the screening, video artists demonstrated the wide range of video art technology today in use. Some artists used a simply-edited, documentary style format to capture, what Gottheim called, "art in life." Others integrated high technology in their work to enhance a theme of "constant transformation" with oscillations of colors, shapes and sounds, and subjects fluidly changing form before the viewers' eyes.

Video art remains exploratory and highly personal in content, Hocking says. Political themes still dominate many of the video works, as shown in the campus screening.

A video artist must have a "working station of equipment" in order to create these productions, Hocking notes. In the cinema department, this includes video and audio synthesizers, two computers, oscillators, an editing system, a portable video unit and television monitors.

Hocking began at the University in 1968 as a lecturer in television production. Current video courses developed from the initial Student Experiments in Television program established by Hocking in 1969. The loosely structured program involved special student productions featuring different aspects of

University life.

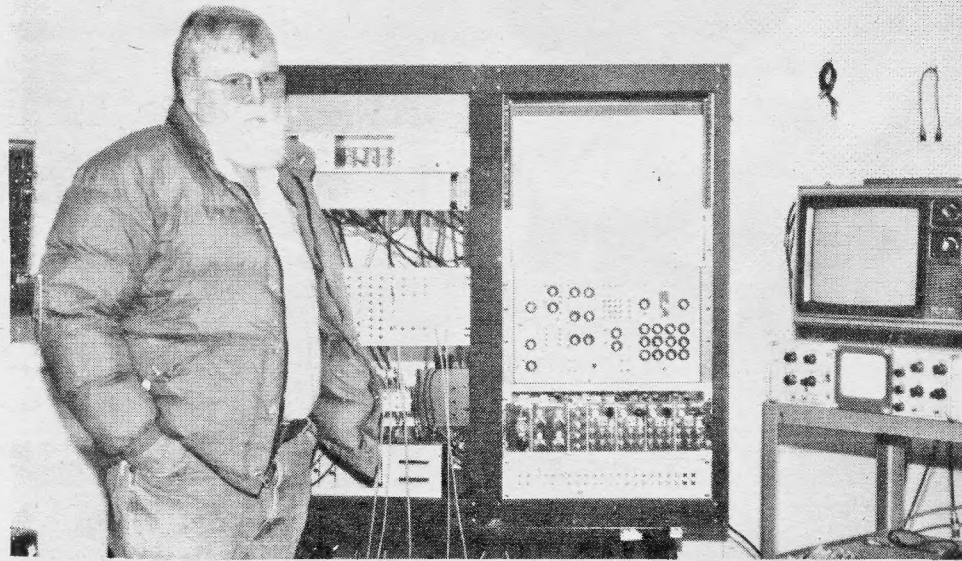
Hocking then incorporated his own Experimental Television Center in Owego, one of only a handful of its kind in the country. Video artists from around the world visit the Center to research, develop and produce video works. Hocking, his wife, Sherry, and a part-time program coordinator, staff the Center which is funded by the New York State Council on the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

These organizations are the primary supporters of video artists who are under the auspices of art centers, Hocking said. "Independently, video artists generally have no access to NEH or state arts funding, and there is little elsewhere." Hocking says this is because the definition of art used by these organizations "excludes the use of video as a device to understand political and social issues unless it is academically (or institutionally) based. It is still very hard to define video art. It is a whole new area with enormous possibilities."

Despite the public's "rampant fascination," as Gottheim puts it, with new modes of electronic imaging, video art has not found its niche. One would expect its most obvious showplace to be the home television set, but only occasionally are collections broadcast, and they appear on local cable stations. However, video art is finding a growing audience through exhibitions in museums, libraries, media centers, alternative art spaces, and even video tape stores.

Students here have shown a steady interest in video courses, Hocking says, with about 25 students now majoring in video and filmmaking. Would Hocking ever join the growing number of his colleagues across the country offering what some call "fad" courses in "Music Video?" "No way!" Hocking says.

—Lois Peters



Ralph Hocking, and cinema department video equipment used in video art creation.